NAVIGATING ACADEMIC STRESS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF RESILIENCE, DISPOSITIONAL OPTIMISM, AND COPING MECHANISMS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN KOLKATA

This dissertation is submitted for the partial fulfillment for the degree of

M.SC IN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY (SPECIALIZATION IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY)

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Navigating academic stress: a correlational study of resilience, dispositional optimism, and coping mechanisms among Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in Kolkata", submitted by Ishika Set, a 2nd year M.sc student in Clinical Psychology, Sister Nivedita University, is as bonafide work, which may be placed before the board of examiners for their evaluation. This is in partial fulfillment for the Degree of M.sc in Clinical Psychology, Sister Nivedita University.

This is an original study done by the candidate and has not been submitted by her before in any form for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

" I, **ISHIKA SET,** hereby declare that the research work titled "Navigating academic stress: a correlational study of resilience, dispositional optimism, and coping mechanisms among Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in Kolkata", conducted by me, has been completed with full honesty and integrity. I confirm that the work is original, and all sources of information have been appropriately acknowledged and cited."

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the association between academic stress, resilience, dispositional optimism, and coping strategies in 200 undergraduate and postgraduate male and female students aged 18–25 in Kolkata, India. Participants were purposively sampled and assessed using the Perceived Academic Stress Scale, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25), Life Orientation Test–Revised (LOT-R), and the Brief COPE Inventory. Descriptive statistics, tests of normality, Spearman's correlation, and Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted using SPSS on current data. It was found that even though resilience and optimism were much greater among PG students, these did not correlate significantly with perceived academic stress. Conversely, emotion-focused coping was positively correlated with academic stress, and sex differences were found in both stress levels and preferred coping—female students indicated higher stress and were more likely to employ emotion-focused coping, while male students were more likely to use problem-focused coping. Sex and academic level variations were also found, where females indicated more academic stress and PG students reported higher optimism and resilience. The research findings endorse that strengthening optimism and coping adaptively may reduce academic stress and promote the well-being of students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION:

In this rapidly advancing society, where the youth faces hindrances and challenges of varied kinds, academic stress has got to be one of the most strenuous deed they encounter and deal with every passing day. In this evolutionary race of humankind for the betterment and striving towards achievement, today's youth struggle to cope with this aspect which might seem very simple on the surface, yet on a deeper level it is much more bewildering. The transition to higher education introduces new challenges for students, including increased academic demands, personal responsibilities and future career uncertainties. An amalgamation of all these factors often produce a significant amount of stress which can be mentally taxing.

1.1 Academic stress:

For centuries, scholars had assumed that students had it easy, believing their only job was to study—something which shouldn't be that much stressful. But the real stress came from the expectations piled up on them by their caregiver and parents. Over time, these pressures got accumulated and turned into overwhelming burden that most of the students found difficult to carry on. According to ***Towbes and Cohen (1996),*** *"stress is a major issue for college students as they cope with a variety of academic, social and personal challenges."*

College students have been experiencing tremendous stress, balancing school, deadlines, and pressure simultaneously to set themselves up for a future that is stable and prosperous. Most of them are confronted with financial woes, social pressures, and the spectrum of failure, fearing that they will fail abysmally if they do not live up to unreasonably high expectations of their parents and society. With time, this perpetual stress can affect their mental and emotional well-being, leaving them completely drained and fatigued. Stress can have numerous physiological and psychological effects such as insomnia, irritability, fatigue, dizziness, gastrointestinal issues, anxiety, burnout and many more.

Academic stress typically arise when students feel mentally pressured because of the fear of failure or even the likelihood of struggling with their studies. They are subjected to massive scholastic pressures, such as deadlines, exams, assessments, class attendance, buckling down with lessons, and pleasing teachers and parents. They can become overwhelmed in competing with their peers and maintaining steady results. When demands become more than a student can absorb, stress sets in, making academic life far more difficult. ***Bisht (1989)*** *defined academic stress as "a demand related to academics that tax or exceed the available resources (internal or external) as cognitively appeared by the student involved."*

According to her, academic stress has 4 key components:

1. **Academic Frustration** – This occurs whenever a student feels there is an obstruction or he/she cannot attain his/her academic objectives.

2. **Academic Conflict** – This occurs when a student encounters demands or decisions that are conflicting, in terms of their academic objectives and achievements.

3. **Academic Pressure** – This occurs when a student feels totally bogged down by the demands of time and effort needed by him/her in order to achieve academic expectations from parents or society.

4. **Academic Anxiety** – This can be defined as fear or apprehension or worry regarding possible setbacks which may appear in achieving academic milestones and success.

1.2 Sources of Academic Stress:

Tyrrell, 1922 asserted, "Identified sources of academic-related stress have included fear of falling behind with coursework, finding the motivation to study, time pressures, financial worries, and concern about academic ability." The sources can be described as:

1.**Academic Pressure:** The most central and essential stressor is the pressure to perform well in academics. As the students enter higher education, they are faced with intense and tedious assignments and coursework. Helping students prepare to deal with this pressure can be done through professors including discussions and collaboration on stress management processes. Having students explore areas on stress, with experienced instructors leading them, and numerous coping strategies can provide them with the necessary skills to manage and control academic pressure efficiently.

2. **Adjusting to New Settings:** The process of adjusting to more sophisticated learning environments can be overwhelming and difficult. Changing from one academic pursuit to another, e.g., from college to university; demands that people adjust to new and altered settings, habits, sophisticated responsibilities, and new social environment. College students who travel abroad or away from their hometown for studies might experience homesickness and loneliness, difficulty in gaining independence, which may in turn reduce their stress levels.

3.**Peer Influence:** Social interaction is an integral part of student life, but peer relationships can be a source of stress and support. There is pressure to fit into all sorts of social norms about fashion, behavior, and friendships to uphold their 'image'. Acceptance, competition, conformity and social expectations best bring about emotional distress, thus adding to much of the stress.

4. **Extracurricular Activities:** Though extracurricular activities are generally recommended for development and well-being, as well as to add strength to college or employment applications, they can turn into a burden as students. They might feel obligated to join several clubs, groups, sports teams, cultural activities or volunteer programs to create a profile that is well-suited. Managing these activities along with coursework can compound their stress, particularly when allocating the time and responsibilities efficiently becomes challenging.

5. **Romantic Relationships:** The stress of romantic relationships is another usual stressor in students. Teenage and college life are usually filled with the thrill and insecurity of dating, relationships, coping with break-ups, or finding it difficult to find a partner to match others' speed. Although relationships bring a feeling of security and satisfaction, they can also become the cause of emotional distress, forcing them to become a major source of stress.

6. **Parental Expectations:** Parents and expectations also contribute considerably to a student's academic and personal growth. Though their support and encouragement enhance development, undue parental expectations turn into a strong stressor. Most parents have an over-expectation for academic success in their children, as well as other aspects of life. Sometimes this pressure feels too much to handle, which makes students feel doubtful about themselves.

Recognizing these stressors and articulating them in an effective way is essential for parents, teachers, and students themselves. By acknowledging the challenges students face and promoting effective stress management techniques coupled with understanding and support, it is possible to create a healthier and relaxing learning environment.

1.3 Effects of Academic Stress:

Long-term exposure to academic stress can cause the development of emotional, psychological, and physical health problems. These include:

- Anxiety, depression and other mental disorders
- Sleep disorder
- Decreased concentration and memory and attention
- Somatic symptoms like headaches and fatigue, gastrointestinal symptoms
- Loss of motivation and burnout

1.4 How to Cope with Academic Stress:

Academic stress can be handled by students using healthy coping mechanisms:

- **Organizing Time:** Giving importance to planning, prioritizing, and adopting a systematic study schedule can avert academic burnouts.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Methods such as deep breathing, meditation, or mindfulness activities can soothe the nervous system and alleviate stress and anxiety.
- **Adopting a Healthy Routine**: Performing physical exercise, consuming healthy food, and resting adequately can enhance well-being and enhance resilience against stress.
- **Achieving Realistic Goals**: Identifying personal weaknesses and establishing realistic and attainable academic goals can assist in eliminating excessive pressure and give a sense of accomplishment and can make the mind calm.
- **Emotional Support:** Discussion with intimate friends, family members, or a mental health practitioner can bring encouragement, hope and fresh insight into coping with stress.

By integrating these methods in their lives, students can easily attempt to develop resilience and have a well-balanced strategy towards their studies as well as professional and future commitments.

1.5 Resilience:

The construct of resilience has changed over time, and it has drawn on various disciplines such as developmental psychology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, and positive psychology. Its application in positive psychology is comparatively recent and focuses on strengths, well-being, and growth instead of recovery from adversity. What follows is a historical and theoretical account of where resilience originated from and how it relates to positive psychology.

Positive psychology, initiated by **Martin Seligman**, is concerned with the strengths of people and flourishing instead of pathology. Resilience, as a capacity to bounce back from adversity, has been a core concept in positive psychology. The studies indicate that resilience is not just an endowment but can be developed through cognitive, emotional, and social resources **(Masten, 2001; Southwick & Charney, 2012).**

Simply put, resilience may be understood as the capacity to recover. Fundamentally, resilience can be seen as the capacity to cope positively and maintain mental health in adversity. The concept has developed with advances in scientific work over time. Researchers from all domains, such as psychology, sociology, along with disciplines like genetics, epigenetics, and neuroscience, have considered resilience. While, there is no accepted definition universally agreed upon. The overall research interest is to understand why certain individuals are able to move through troubles and challenges without suffering significant physical or mental health maladies. *As cited by* ***Russo et al., 2012; Rutter, 2012; Southwick and Charney, 2012, "Resilience is the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning."*** Traumatic experiences are viewed as a normal and inescapable part of life, and it is common for the majority of individuals to experience events considered to be traumatic during their lifetime.

It is important to know how resilience arises and how it may be bolstered, not only to enhance coping mechanisms but to diminish responses to stress that are unfavorable to our health and wellbeing. Although resilience research is still ongoing, current investigations have emphasized several factors including genetic, developmental, psychological, and neurochemical factors; that play a role in resilience and render an individual vulnerable to stress-related disorders. Resilience may be viewed as an individual's capacity for withstanding disturbance and transforming adaptively without relinquishing its original structure, function, and essence. It is not merely being resistant to change but more in adjusting and changing in a manner that retains value. This calls for balance in stability and change so that despite changing conditions, continuity is observed.

1.6 Sources of Resilience:

Resilience is developed by a host of internal and external influences that allow people to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficulties. Such sources can be grouped broadly under personal, social, and environmental influences, which all contribute towards building emotional resilience and flexibility.

1. Personal Factors

Individual traits and inner resources significantly determine resilience. A few of the important personal sources are:

•**Self-Awareness and Emotional Control**: Those who know their feelings and are good at controlling them are better placed to cope with stress and adversity. Being able to remain calm under pressure aids in keeping things in perspective and making sensible decisions.

•**Positive Attitude and Positive Thinking**: Having a positive attitude promotes perseverance and problem-solving. Individuals who think about solutions more than they worry about failures are likely to bounce back from adversity more rapidly.

•**Self-Efficacy and Confidence:** Having faith in one's capacity to survive and thrive in the face of difficulties enhances resilience. Self-confidence in abilities and decision-making enables a person to tackle challenges with resolve.

•**Adaptability and Flexibility:** The ability to adapt to ever-changing situations is essential for resilience. People who welcome change and view problems as opportunities for learning are more resilient in the face of challenges.

•**Sense of Purpose and Meaning:** A strong sense of purpose—be it through personal aspirations, religion, or service to others—gives hope during tough times and keeps one resilient.

2. Social Support Systems

Resilience is also not just a personal ability; others' support is an important contributor to emotional health. Social sources of resilience are:

•**Family Support**: Close family relationships offer emotional security, encouragement, and feelings of belongingness, which may serve as a buffer against stress.

•**Friendship and Community Links:** Good relations with peers, mentors, and community members provide advice, company, and reassurance in adverse situations.

•**Mentors and Role Models**: Learning from people who are resilient—parents, teachers, or public figures—can motivate others to learn to cope and persist in adversity.

•**Cultural and Religious Beliefs**: Cultural beliefs and religious practices tend to offer comfort, strength, and a sense of identity, enabling persons to cope with adversity with resilience.

3. Environmental and Societal Factors

An environment that supports resilience works by offering stability, security, and the chance to grow. Important environmental sources are:

•**Educational Opportunities:** Having access to education and skills development increases problem-solving skills and a sense of competence, both of which contribute to resilience.

• **Economic Stability:** Material security diminishes stress and lets people concentrate on self-development in place of merely surviving each day. Secure and steady income together with resources in hand can diminish the stress that comes during troublesome times.

• **Safe and Supportive Communities:** Residing within a secure, supportive setting assures mental wellness. Healthy interpersonal associations within residential environments, schools, or places of employment can act as insurance protection against mental upset.

•**Mental Health Resource Access:** Access to counseling, therapy, and other mental health care services enables people to establish coping skills and develop resilience when faced with challenges.

1.7 The Role of Resilience in Mental Health

Resilience plays a pivotal role in maintaining psychological well-being. It helps individuals cope with stress, recover from trauma, and reduce the risk of developing anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders. Those with strong resilience are better equipped to handle pressure, setbacks, and unexpected changes without feeling overwhelmed.

1.8 Resilience in Academics

developing resilience in academic fields can enable students to manage the growing pressure and demands on their career prospects. It is of greatest importance that students are geared with the strategies to develop and enhance resilience so that it becomes less burdensome for their mental health and they can easily manage the issues and scholarly pressures without the sensations of anxiety, irritability or exhaustion.

1.9 Developing and Enhancing Resilience

Resilience can be cultivated through conscious efforts and lifestyle practices. Some methods to build resilience are:

- Practicing self-care, such as healthy behaviors like regular exercise, proper diet, and adequate sleep.
- Fostering a growth mindset by viewing failures as learning opportunities and not as defeats or failures.
- Reaching out to friends, family, or professionals for perspective and support.
- Practicing mindfulness or relaxation skills to cope with stress.
- Establishing realistic goals and segmenting obstacles into feasible steps to keep motivation high and work towards achievement.

Resilience is a necessary life skill that allows one to confront difficulties with grace, flexibility, determination and hope. It is not about merely avoiding life's difficulties, but more about having the strength and capability to survive and learn from these difficulties.

1.10 Dispositional Optimism:

Optimism can be understood as having a positive approach towards life. One could easily have a positive attitude when everything is running smoothly. But when life is showered with obstacles and challenges, then it is heavy to have that positive attitude. However, regarding all things in a positive way, keeping that light aglow despite the drawbacks is the genuine article. ***Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (2000)*** *considered, "optimism is a dispositional tendency of an individual to hold generalized positive expectancies even when people confront adversity or difficulty in their lives."*

Dispositional optimism is the long-standing expectation that good things will happen in the future. It is a reflection of one's inherent tendency to anticipate positive outcomes in various areas of life. As a fixed personality trait, it influences the manner in which individuals approach adversity and take advantage of opportunities, shaping their general outlook and response to the uncertainties of life.

1.11 Characteristics of optimistic people:

Those who possess dispositional optimism may have some traits like,

•**Perceive Challenges as Temporary**: Rather than viewing challenges as fixed obstacles, optimists view them as a chance to learn and grow.

•**Have Confidence in the Future:** They tend to have faith that good things will occur, and this enables them to remain encouraged even in bad situations.

•**Use Active Coping Strategies:** Optimists tend to be more problem-focused in their behaviors compared to being overwhelmed by stress.

• **Experience Greater Emotional Well-Being**: Research indicates that those with a positive disposition have increased happiness and reduced depression and anxiety.

1.12 Influence of Dispositional Optimism on Well-Being and Academic Performance:

Dispositional optimism is linked to a range of advantages, both mentally and physically:

• **Improved Stress Management**: Optimists tend to employ coping strategies that are adaptive in nature, like seeking advice or perceiving obstacles as challenges, which enables them to cope well with stress.

•**Improved Physical Health**: Studies indicate that optimists have improved cardiovascular health, a higher immune function, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases.

•**Greater Satisfaction with Life**: Optimism is associated with more positive overall life satisfaction since positive thinkers are more likely to enter into satisfactory relationships, pursue life goals, and meet failures with resilience.

Creating a More Optimistic Mindset

Although certain individuals may by nature possess a greater optimism, optimism can also be developed through effort of will. Methods of developing a positive outlook include:

•**Practicing Gratitude**: Frequent review of the good things in life has the potential to strengthen an optimistic outlook.

- **Reframing Negative Thoughts:** Finding ways to challenge pessimistic ideas and replace them with more positive ones can serve to alter general thought patterns.

•**Achieving Realistic Goals:** Striving toward attainable goals and recognizing achievement builds confidence and an optimistic attitude toward the future.

•**Creating a Support System:** Having positive and encouraging people around is one way that an optimistic attitude can be supported.

The most commonly applied instrument utilized for assessing dispositional optimism is the Life Orientation Test (LOT) developed by **Scheier and Carver, 1985; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994.** As far as Carver and Scheier are concerned, dispositional optimism is defined as a personality trait which is frequently conceptualized as a generalized belief that good things will occur.

1.13 Coping Strategies:

Based on ***Lazarus and Folkman 1985,*** *"Coping refers to cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral efforts to address (master, reduce, or tolerate) a troubled person-environment relationship."*

Coping mechanisms are behavioral and cognitive attempts that people employ to deal with stress, adversity, and emotions. They are essential to psychological health and resilience. Coping mechanisms can be either adaptive (effective in stress reduction) or maladaptive (aggravating stress or coping through evasiveness).

1.14 THEORIES OF COPING:

1. **The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping**, developed by **Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman** (1984), considers coping as an interactive, dynamic process between a person and the environment. According to this model, stress occurs when demands from the environment exceed a person's perceived capacity to cope. The

model emphasizes the cognitive appraisal process in determining how people view and react to stressors.

Based on this model, when confronted with a possible stressor, people go through two appraisal stages: primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal entails the determination of whether an occurrence is stressful, irrelevant, or positive. In case the occurrence is found to be stressful, the individual goes ahead and determines whether it poses a threat (possible damage), harm/loss (damage already inflicted), or challenge (room for growth). This is followed by secondary appraisal, wherein people assess their accessible coping resources—both internal (e.g., resilience, problem-solving abilities) and external (e.g., social support, financial resources)—and determine which coping methods to employ.

The model differentiates between two main types of coping: **problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping**. Problem-focused coping addresses the stressor directly, including planning, looking for solutions, or changing the situation. Problem-focused coping works best when the stressor can be controlled. Emotion-focused coping, instead, seeks to manage emotional responses by means such as seeking emotional support, cognitive reappraisal, or relaxation. This type of strategy works well when an uncontrollable stressor exists (e.g., bereavement or chronic illness).

This model has been used extensively in research on stress management and has been followed in the formulation of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) methods. It is criticized, though, for not being completely responsive to automatic or unconscious coping processes, and some researchers posit that coping is more than a direct appraisals process.

2. Approach-Avoidance Model of Coping (Roth & Cohen, 1986)

The Roth and Cohen (1986) Approach-Avoidance Model categorizes coping mechanisms on a continuum of whether or not individuals approach or withdraw from a stressor. The model proposes that individuals deal with stress using approach-based strategies, where one actively confronts and deals with stress, or avoidance-based strategies, where one escapes, denies, or distances himself from the stressor.

Approach coping includes behaviors such as seeking social support, problem-solving, and cognitive restructuring. These strategies promote long-term stress reduction and psychological resilience. Avoidance coping, on the other hand, includes behaviors like denial, distraction, and substance use. While avoidance strategies may provide short-term relief, they often lead to greater distress and maladaptive outcomes over time.

This model is especially helpful for explaining maladaptive coping styles, like procrastination, drug use, or too much escapism. It has been found that those who use avoidance coping to a great extent are at a greater risk of developing anxiety disorders, depression, and chronic stress diseases. Some research indicates, though, that short-term

avoidance coping can be useful on occasion, specifically with acute trauma, when an immediate face-off with the stressor would be overwhelming.

3. The COPE Model (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989)

The COPE Model, as constructed by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989), builds on earlier coping theories in that it classifies coping methods into a multidimensional system. This model also introduced the COPE Inventory, which has been commonly utilized in the measurement of coping behavior.

Three primary modes of coping have been identified in the COPE model:

Problem-focused coping – Taking direct action to remedy a problem (e.g., planning, seeking information, taking initiative).

Emotion-focused coping – Managing emotional distress (e.g., acceptance, humor, seeking emotional support).

Dysfunctional coping (avoidant coping) – Strategies that potentially increase stress (e.g., denial, substance use, behavioral disengagement).

This model further incorporated positive reinterpretation and growth, highlighting the fact that stressful experiences can be reframed positively, resulting in psychological growth and resilience. COPE Inventory has been used to conduct research in which it was demonstrated that persons who use healthy coping strategies, like problem-solving, positive reappraisal, and emotional regulation, have better mental health when compared to people who use avoidant or disengagement styles.

The strength of the COPE Model is that it is able to capture the complexity of coping behavior since individuals might employ several coping behaviors at the same time. One of the limitations is that it does not necessarily consider situational variability, i.e., some coping behaviors might prove useful in a particular situation but not another.

1.15 Three Key Coping Strategies for Managing Stress

Coping strategies are the methods by which people cope with stress, manage challenges, and preserve emotional health. Problem-focused coping aids individuals in working through difficult problems without being burdened by the stress. While numerous methods for coping exist, three commonly understood strategies are problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping. They each have different functions and work well under varying circumstances.

1. Problem-Focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is about confronting the source of stress in order to decrease or eliminate it. The technique works best when one has control over the situation and can change it for the better. Rather than worrying about the problem, those using this method center on the solution.

Examples of problem-focused coping:

•Developing a study plan to get ready for a critical exam instead of freaking out.

• Shattering a huge task into smaller, manageable steps to ease feelings of overwhelm.

This approach is helpful since it helps to encourage proactive behavior and problem-solving abilities that lead to long-term stress reduction. Nevertheless, it might not be workable in scenarios that are outside one's control, such as the death of a loved one.

2. Emotion-Focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping is employed when a situation cannot be altered, and the aim is to deal with emotional reactions but not with changing the stressor itself. Emotion-focused coping assists people in controlling their emotions, establishing balance within themselves, and developing strength.

Examples of emotion-focused coping:

- Using relaxation activities such as breathing deeply or meditating to cope with anxiety.
- Aiding in dealing with feelings through communication with a trusted counselor or friend.
- •Participating in creative activities like writing, painting, or music to express feelings in a positive way.

Although this strategy does not remove stressors, it aids individuals in retaining emotional stability, particularly in circumstances that cannot be avoided like sickness, personal bereavement, or uncontrollable changes in life.

3. Avoidance Coping

Avoidance coping is the tendency to ignore or divert oneself from the situation of stress instead of dealing with it. Though this strategy offers short-term relief, overdependence on avoidance can cause unsolved problems and more stress in the long run.

Examples of avoidance coping:

- Excessive TV watching or playing video games to avoid responsibilities.
- Avoiding confrontation in difficult conversations or situations instead of facing them.

- Turning to unhealthy behaviors like overeating or drugs to suppress emotional pain.

Though avoidance coping is not itself harmful, it is overall less effective than active coping styles. Distraction can, when used in limited doses, be useful for taking a mental vacation from stress, but chronic avoidance will stop an individual from solving problems and personal development.

Coping skills are important to deal with stress and keep oneself mentally healthy. Problem-focused coping is useful when action can yield solutions, emotion-focused coping maintains feelings in uncontrollable situations, and avoidance coping gives temporary escape but can contribute to more difficulty if used excessively. Knowing these and using them in the right way can aid people in handling life's adversities with better strength and courage.

The emerging need of doing my dissertation on "**academic stress, resilience, dispositional optimism, and coping strategies among UG and PG students in Kolkata**" is based on the growing mental health issues among students in higher education. As the society is advancing rapidly, we should not ignore what seems very simple from the outside but can be detrimental on a deeper level. Although academic stress is a topic of extensive research, research on how resilience and dispositional optimism influence coping strategies in the case of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Kolkata is scarce. This research is new in the sense that it examines such psychological factors within a specific education and cultural context and offers insights regarding how students in Kolkata are managing academic stress. The understanding of these factors may unveil resilience factors promoting well-being and academic performance. Furthermore, this research has practical significance in that it has the potential to inform teachers, policymakers, and mental health experts on the ideal intervention strategies to adopt in helping the students, towards a healthier educational environment.

In this race of life where everybody is striving towards high and long term success, people usually neglect the most crucial thing, and that is- their well being. Their well being is constantly compromised under this pressure to always succeed. We need to understand the grave impact academic stress can impose on students' well being so that we, as mental health professionals can formulate interventional strategies tailored to suit the younger generations' needs and well being.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2. *LITERATURE REVIEW:*

The current study aims to explore the associations between academic stress, resilience, dispositional optimism and coping strategies among UG and PG students of Kolkata. Resilience in simple terms, can be understood as the capacity to bounce back from hardships while dispositional optimism can be understood as the positive approach towards life and existence. The coping strategies can be classified into 3 broad terms: problem focused, emotion focused and avoidant focused. Students employ these strategies to deal with the mounting academic stress that they face in their day to day lives.

2.1 ACADEMIC STRESS:

University students are often exposed to numerous stressors, such as academic stress, financial stress, and personal stress. A systematic review conducted by **Hossain et al. (2022)** revealed that about 38% of students had moderate academic stress, with 5% having high levels. The main causes of this stress are preparation for exams, assignment due dates, and grade competition.

Academic stress has been widely described as a psychological reaction to the pressures and demands of academic responsibilities such as exams, assignments, and competition (**Zhang et al.**, 2021). High academic expectations, interpersonal conflicts, financial difficulties, and uncertainty regarding future careers are contributing factors (**Pascoe et al.**, 2020). Recent research highlights the variability of the experience of stress by gender, culture, and socio-economic context, reflecting its multi-dimensional quality (**Beiter et al.**, 2015).

2.2 RESILIENCE:

In a study conducted by **T. Edwards, J.C. Catling & E. Parry** in 2016, data was collected from 161 participants and they were assessed on resilience, adverse childhood experiences, locus of control, stressful events and academic delay of gratification. They found out that higher levels of adversity in an individual's relationship with their parents were related to lower levels of resilience. Increased number of stressful events were related to higher number of adverse experiences, a more adverse relationship with family and adverse family environment. They also identified an individual's relationship with parents and Locus Of Control as a significant predictor of resilience. Lack of adversity in relation to parents and an internal locus of control predicted higher levels of resilience.

In another study conducted in 2015 by **Jorie Pollak Himmel,** 157 students from Boston constituted the sample and they were assessed on resilience and its conceptual understanding, along with mastery, optimism, emotional regulation, as well as depression, anxiety and stress. Findings suggest that participants who exhibited higher conceptual understanding of resilience tend to score higher on the measures of both resilience and optimism, in comparison to those in the low and medium understanding groups. It also indicates a predictive relationship between optimism and resilience. However, it has been found out that the conceptual understanding of resilience merely is not the predictor of how resilient an individual behaves.

In 2020, **Jeffrey M Warren and Robyn W Hale** performed research on predicting grit and resilience where they took 289 undergraduate students in the southeastern united states and gave out a demographic questionnaire, Short Grit Scale created by Duckworth and Quinn in 2009, Brief Resilience Scale and Academic Rational Beliefs Scale. The analysis revealed a positive association between work habit and grit and resilience. A relationship between evaluation and grit was also noticed. Predictors of grit include academic rational beliefs related to evaluation and work habits. Academic rational beliefs related to work habits are also found to be related to resilience.

2.3 DISPOSITIONAL OPTIMISM:

In 2006, **Vivien S. Huan, Lay See Yeo, Rebecca P. Ang, and Wan Har Chong** performed research on dispositional optimism and gender on perception of academic stress. The participants were administered the academic expectations stress inventory to assess their level of academic stress. The scales used were Academic Expectations Stress Inventory (AESI) and Life Orientation Test (LOT). The results clearly indicated that students who are optimistic reported less academic stress while pessimistic students reported higher academic stress. In other words, those students who exhibited higher optimism were likely to perceive academic stress to a lesser extent than the pessimistic students.

Joelle C. Ruthig1, Tara l. Haynes2, Raymond P. Perry2 and Judith G. Chipperfield3 (2006) carried out a research regarding academic optimistic bias. The sample consisted of 640 first year students from Canadian research university and they were administered Academic optimistic bias scale, academic control cognitions. Apart from that prior achievement, academic performance and well being were also assessed. Findings reveal optimistically biased students had a more adaptive profile of academic control cognitions; that is, they had controllable attributions to their academic outcomes and showed greater perceptions of control.

Hope and optimism as predictors of academic performance and subjective well-being in college students was a topic of research carried out by **Kevin L. Rand** (2020). 334 undergraduate students of midwestern university participated in this research study. The researchers conducted a longitudinal and observational study on hope and optimism examining the varied and defined roles hope and optimism in predicting academic performance and subjective well being. Results suggest that Hope and optimism are seen to be associated with better academic performance and psychological well-being. Both hope and optimism appear to predict changes in subjective well being.

2.4 COPING STRATEGY:

In 2014, Elisabetta Sagone and Maria Elvira De Caroli, carried out a correlational study on dispositional optimism, psychological well being, and coping strategies in university students. The sample constituted of 183 Italian university students from university of Catania, Sicily. The Dispositional Resilience Scale-II elaborated by Sinclair and Oliver, Psychological Well Being Scale created by Ryff and Singer, and the COPE inventory (Italian version). Findings

reveal correlations among dispositional resilience, the dimensions of psychological well being, and the coping strategies.

In 2014, **Ming Sing Chai et al** took a sample of 148 students of a university in Malaysia. They were administered the Leonard Personality Inventory (LPI), the perceived stress scale and the cope inventory. The bivariate analysis indicated that individuals with high openness, analytical and decisive personality are more likely to use problem focused coping. Those with high analytical personality dimensions use more logical reasoning and prefer to follow rules and procedure and be precised.

2.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC STRESS AND RESILIENCE:

WESTERN PERSPECTIVES:

A meta-analysis and systematic review conducted by **Sameed Ansari and Naved iqbal** analyzed 25 studies involving non-medical university students to investigate the relationship between stress and resilience. It was found that there was a robust negative correlation between stress and resilience, which means that increased resilience has a link with decreased perceived stress as well as better well-being. For example, research conducted **by Al-Mahrouqi et al. (2023) and Cabell & Medina (2023)** emphasized that resilient students had improved coping skills, which resulted in lower stress levels and increased academic achievement. These findings reinforce the need to develop resilience to alleviate the negative impact of academic stress.

Scott E Wilks (2008) carried out a cross-sectional survey of 236 social work students to investigate the mediatory role of resilience and social support in managing academic stress. The research utilized the Academic Stress Scale, Resilience Scale, and Social Support Questionnaire. Students were randomly recruited from accredited social work programs. The results showed that social support, especially from friends, was a moderator of the relationship between academic stress and resilience. Students with good social support systems indicated lower levels of stress and greater resilience, underlining the significance of peer and institutional support in the academic environment.

Wang, Q., Sun, W., & Wu, H. (2022) research adopted a longitudinal research design, measuring 1,200 medical students across three waves. Researchers applied the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey, Resilience Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale in analyzing the impact of resilience on academic burnout and satisfaction with life. The study applied cluster sampling to recruit participants from various medical universities. Findings showed that resilience was a strong predictor of life satisfaction and counteracted the negative influence of academic burnout. The research underscored the importance of developing resilience interventions to ward off burnout in stressful academic settings.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) point to the importance of resilience in the mitigation of academic stress, particularly in relation to a growth mindset. Students holding the belief that they can strengthen their abilities score better academically and handle problems better. This points to the potential of mindset interventions in building resilience and reducing academic stress

among university students. Through teaching a growth mindset, instructors are able to give students the psychological tools to cope with academic stress better.

In a similar vein, **Bacchi and Licinio** (2017) identify resilience as an academic stress protective factor, implying that psychological resources are vital in preventing issues related to stress. From their study, interventions aimed at enhancing resilience are crucial in assisting learners in managing academic adversity, thus promoting their mental well-being.

EASTERN PERSPECTIVES:

Mallick and Kaur (2016) examined 600 high school students from Punjab, India, with the Learning Environment Scale and Academic Resilience Scale. Stratified random sampling was used. A positive correlation was found between an encouraging learning environment and greater academic resilience, showing that extrinsic factors are responsible for building student resilience.

This research by **Reddy, K.J.** (2018) investigates the different sources of academic stress among Indian university students, including factors like personal inadequacy, fear of failure, teacher-pupil relationships, interpersonal problems, and poor study facilities. The study points out the widespread prevalence of academic stress across streams and calls for specific interventions to counteract these stressors. Knowledge of the particular sources of stress can help in formulating strategies to improve resilience among students. Gender differences reveal women to have higher levels of fear of failure than men.

This research carried by **Chaturvedi and Chander (2023)** examined the impact of social support and resilience on academic stress in 229 Indian migrant students. Researchers utilized the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List, Nicholson McBride Resilience Questionnaire, and Perceptions of Academic Stress Scale. With purposive sampling, the research established that both social support and resilience were predictors of reduced academic stress.

Goyal's (2021) research was intended to examine the interconnection between academic stress, self-concept, and resilience in students. A sample of 200 school students and undergraduates was considered using convenience sampling. Standardized tools like the Academic Stress Scale, Self-Concept Questionnaire, and Resilience Scale were employed to assess the variables. The research employed a quantitative approach, with structured questionnaires for data collection. Findings revealed that undergraduates reported greater academic stress, self-concept, and resilience than school students. Yet, academic stress and resilience were found to be weakly and negatively correlated, indicating that resilience might not be a reliable predictor of student stress levels.

2.6 DIFFERENCES IN SEX:

The current survey by **Yalcin-Siedentopf, N.,**(2021) examined the influence of sex on the relationships between resilience and perception of social support and stress in students. Resilience was measured by the Resilience Scale. The perceived stress and the perception of social support were quantified with the Perceived Stress Scale and Social Support Questionnaire respectively. 503 subjects were included in the study. They found a significant

sex effect with significantly lower resilience and increased perception of stress and social support in females. Statistically significant correlations among resilience, perceived stress, and perceived social support were identified in both genders with women demonstrating a more intense interrelationship between stress perception and resilience as well as social support perception. The correlation between perceived social support and stress was completely mediated by resilience in men and partially mediated by resilience in women. The present findings indicate that sex-specific, tailored intervention targeting the enhancement of resilience and the claiming of social support is necessary to enhance mental health in emerging adults.

2.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC STRESS AND DISPOSITIONAL OPTIMISM

WESTERN PERSPECTIVES:

Evidence has shown that dispositional optimism has an impact on the ways individuals interpret and deal with stressors in academically influenced environments. **Vizoso et al.** (2019) assessed the influence of dispositional optimism on academic burnout and achievement among university students. Results demonstrated that students who scored high in optimism showed lower tendencies toward emotional exhaustion, which is a central element of academic burnout. This emphasizes optimism as a buffer against academic stress, boosting students' general well-being and performance.

Optimism not only directly affects stress levels but also mediates the relationship between other psychological factors and academic performance. **Gao** (2023) emphasized that academic anxiety partially mediates the relationship between academic stress and burnout. Here, developing dispositional optimism may increase self-efficacy, thus decreasing academic anxiety and stress, which eventually prevents burnout. This mediating effect of optimism indicates a complex interaction of psychological factors that need to be explored further.

The association between academic performance and dispositional optimism has been documented extensively. **Singh and Jha** (2013) established a negative correlation between optimism and anxiety, which indicates that greater levels of optimism not only lower anxiety but also positively impact academic performance. This is in line with **Icekson et al.** (2020), which indicated that high dispositional optimism is associated with better academic performance, particularly for students with high conscientiousness. Together, these studies emphasize the promise of optimism as a method for improving academic achievement through the alleviation of stress.

In addition, the study by **Ye et al.** (2019) shows that greater dispositional optimism is associated with higher hope, which is an important psychological resource for academic success. This indicates that optimism can contribute to resilience, allowing students to better deal with stressors and academic challenges.

This research by Huynh, H.P., Reiss, J., & Sanchez, R. (2024) assessed the relative value of dispositional optimism and resilience as predictors of different types of academic stress among 355 first-year college students. Using the Perceived Stress Scale and the measures for optimism and resilience, the study identified that both negatively correlated with academic stress.

Resilience was the better predictor for stress from academic self-perceptions, whereas optimism was a better predictor of stress from pressure to perform and lack of time. These results indicate that the development of resilience as well as optimism can actually reduce various aspects of academic stress.

To explore the effect of dispositional optimism and gender in how adolescents perceive academic stress, this research made use of a sample of high school students, conducted by **Yeo, L.S., & Thompson, M.M.** (2006)The results showed that increased optimis

m was linked with decreased academic stress perceptions. There were also gender differences, with female students experiencing more stress than male students. The research highlights the buffering effect of optimism in the academic environment and emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive interventions for stress management.

Salami, S.O. (2011) investigated the associations between personality, affect, emotional intelligence, and coping styles in the prediction of academic stress among university students. The research revealed that dispositional optimism as a personality was negatively related to academic stress. Optimistic students with higher levels of optimism used more adaptive coping mechanisms and had lower levels of stress, indicating that optimism plays a role in effective stress management in academic settings.

Agnes, M. & Joy, M. (2023) examined the association between dispositional optimism and perceived stress among Indian students of a university. Sample consisted of 180 students. The results revealed that the levels of perceived stress were lower in students who scored higher on dispositional optimism. Females showed higher degrees of perceived stress than males,yet no significant gender difference was found in dispositional optimism. The authors posit that an optimistic attitude can act as a protective factor for stress, hence contributing to better student well-being and academic achievement.

Senger(2021)analyzed the relationship between psychological capital dimensions—e.g., optimism and hope—and college student academic stress in India. The sample consisted of 122 students. Data was collected using Psychological Capital Questionnaire, Happiness Scale and Perceived stress scale. The results suggested that academic stress was negatively correlated with optimism and hope levels. The study identifies the importance of interventions focused on building psychological capital to combat academic stress and promote mental health. The present research also indicated that PsyCap possesses significant and positive correlation with happiness on one hand, while on the other hand, it has strong and Negative relationship with students' perceived academic stress.

Chamuah(2019)examined the impact of self-esteem, learned optimism, and resilience on university students' mental health in India. The findings of the study indicated that learned optimism and resilience were strong predictors of improved mental health outcomes. Students with high optimism and resilience levels reported low academic stress and improved emotional well-being, emphasizing the significance of these characteristics in the academic environment.

EASTERN PERSPECTIVES:

This study by Joshi, R and Joshi, P (2021) investigates the relationship between optimism and perceived stress in young adults, with university students in India included. The study finds

a notable inverse relationship between optimism and perceived stress, showing that greater optimism is related to lower stress. The results highlight the promise of optimism as a protective factor against stress in academic contexts. Results indicated that optimism was negatively associated with self-perceived stress. Women were seen to have significantly higher on perceived stress levels than males. While the gender difference in optimism level was said to be negligible.

This correlational study by **Zaheer, Z**(2022) explored the association between perceived stress, resilience, optimism and psychological well-being among university students and further evaluated the mediator role of optimism between perceived stress, resilience and psychological well-being. A sample of 530 university students from various universities were given Perceived Stress Scale, Brief Resilience Scale, Life Orientation Test- Revised, Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale and a demographic form. Outcomes of the study indicated a positive correlation of resilience with optimism and psychological well-being whereas perceived stress showed a negative correlation with optimism and psychological well-being. It was also identified that perceived stress, optimism and resilience strongly predicted three sub-scales of psychological wellbeing i.e., autonomy, environmental mastery and self-acceptance while only resilience and optimism predicted the remaining three sub-scales: personal growth, positive relation with others and purpose in life. In addition, optimism was identified to mediate the association between perceived stress, resilience and psychological wellbeing in university students.

2.8 DIFFERENCES IN SEX:

This research by **Misigo, B. L.** (2015) examined Gender impact on perceived stress level and coping methods of undergraduate university students in Kenya. The population consisted of students from three government universities in the western region of Kenya. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were employed to sample the respondents. This research employed a crosssectional survey research design. A biographical sheet and a perceived stress scale questionnaire were utilized to gather data. Findings reveal Female participants also indicated positive stress coping skills including seeking help from counsellors and friends. While male participants indicated negative coping strategies like consumption of alcohol and drug.

The present research conducted by **Choudhary, A. & Ghosh, P.D.** (2024) consisted a sample of 200 individuals. Adult Hope Scale of Snyder and State Optimism Measure of Millstein were utilized as instruments in gathering the data. The findings of the data were that there is no statistical difference in hope and optimism based on gender, and there is no statistical difference in hope and optimism between students and professionals. Both groups scored high when it comes to hope and moderately when it comes to optimism.

2.9 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING STRATEGY

WESTERN PERSPECTIVES:

The association between academic stress and coping among university students has received much focus in recent years, especially within the context of global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic stress has traditionally been blamed on several factors, such as workload, deadlines, and academic demands (**Bedewy & Gabriel,** 2015). It is imperative to understand these stressors so that effective coping mechanisms can be developed to guide students through their academic lives successfully. This review of literature integrates existing research evidence on academic stress, coping mechanisms, and their relationship, as well as highlighting gaps in knowledge and proposing directions for future research.

The shift to e-learning through the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to heighten students' stress levels. **Fawaz and Samaha** (2020) detected a significant relationship between student satisfaction with e-learning and mental health symptoms, where it implies that coping mechanisms among students need to be modified to fit the novel challenges faced by distance learning. Knowledge about these dynamics can improve the success of support systems in universities.

Graves et al. (2021) investigated gender variation in coping, and it was found that female students report increased levels of stress and utilize particular strategies like emotional support seeking. This highlights the need for interventions that are sensitive to gender in order to ensure that coping is tailored to needs.

Further, research shows varying effectiveness of coping strategies. As an example, **Gustems-Carnicer et al.** (2019) reported that the use of avoidance coping strategies correlated with increased levels of stress as well as less academic achievement. In contrast, rational coping approaches were correlated with decreased levels of stress and more academic success for dental students (**Crego et al.,** 2016). These results attest to the efficacy of educating the students with potent coping strategies so that they would be able to improve their study performance and control stress.

The use of emotional intelligence in academic stress management has also been highlighted. **Ramli et al.** (2018) discovered that increased emotional intelligence is associated with increased resilience and decreased academic stress. Hence, interventions to increase emotional intelligence can act as efficient coping mechanisms for students.

This study conducted by **Wong Aitken et al.** (20024) explored stress, stressors and coping styles of university students. The research seeks to clarify the degree of stress among university students, sources of stress they experience, their coping strategies, and the correlations between the degree of stress and some academic, health-related, and sociodemographic variables. The study categorizes variables associated with academic stress into five groups: (1) adaptation to change; (2) study modality; (3) learning resources; (4) academic–life balance; and (5) socio-emotional variables.

This study by **Dr. Mathhew C.P**(2017) surveyed 100 college students from various academic disciplines. The researcher gazed into the socio democratic picture of the subjects, the stress level among college students and the coping strategies used by college students to handle stress. More specific explanatory studies at the disposal of the researcher on the different dimensions of the study. The study has ample fact finding studies and proper interpretations. Therefore, descriptive design was utilized in the study. Most of the students indicated moderate levels of stress. Coping strategies shared by most of them were listening to music, physical exercise, and social support. Problem-focused coping strategies were found to have a significant negative correlation with stress levels, which implied that students who confront stressors actively reported lower levels of stress.

Nagle Y.K. (2018)focused on gaining an insight into the role of academic stress in young adults, their emotional adjustment and coping style. Academic stress among students has grown enormously over a duration of time due to the expectation of parents and competitive atmosphere among students. This has caused having a detrimental impact to the individual, parent, society and nation as a whole. Many researches have indicated that shocking number of students are unable to handle due to burdened syllabus, parents' pressure and cut throat competition among students which leads them towards mental health issues like depression, anxiety and suicide. All these facts need urgent attention; therefore, awareness among students, parents and educators should be developed so that preventive steps can be initiated to develop a friendly and healthy environment. To overcome all these problems, the counselors and medical professionals should initiate steps towards bringing awareness amongst parents and educators about their roles to provide a healthy atmosphere. Accordingly, for the protection of the youth from such susceptible tendencies, they ought to be advised for creative constructive endeavors to stimulate their capabilities, interest, talents, and bring motivation to perform the desired thing.

EASTERN PERSPECTIVES:

Nitin Joseph and colleagues (2020) took forward a research on assessment of Academic Stress and Its Coping Mechanisms, which involved 450 medical undergraduate students. The students were informed regarding academic stress and aims of this study in the classroom context and written informed consent was obtained for their involvement. For ensuring anonymity, the completed consent form were initially recovered back from the participants. Subsequently, the questionnaires were administered by the researchers. It was a semi-structured questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions. It was pre-tested among a sample of ten students prior to its application in the present study. No modifications in the questionnaire ensued after the pre-testing and data gathered during this phase were not used in the final study. High prevalence of academic stress was noted among medical students, with the highest prevalence in the first and second years. Active coping, planning, and acceptance were the most common coping strategies. Female students used emotional support and venting as a form of coping mechanism more than male students.

In the research conducted by Barman (2023) a sincere effort is made to investigate the academic stress, the different dimensions of academic stress and coping mechanisms among the students pursuing education in colleges in Shillong, Meghalaya. As a sample for study,

199 students of various colleges in Shillong were selected. The sample consisted of 71 male and 128 female students. For assessing the academic stress level among the students, the Academic Stress Scale by Rajendran and Kaliappan (1990) was given to college going students. Brief COPE Scale was given to know the coping mechanism employed by the college youths of Shillong in order to cope with academic stress. The survey findings when integrated and interpreted with regard to goals for the study revealed that there is moderate level (69.3%) of stress among the college going students in Shillong. A comparison of the findings by the age group and academic stress of college students is discovered to be the age group of 21-23 which is 50.7%. According to the results of this study, educational institutions must take proactive measures to deal with the prevalence of academic stress among students.

2.10 DIFFERENCES IN SEX:

This research by **Anbumalr C.** (2017) was carried out in several co-education colleges. The survey is utilized to determine the perceived levels of stress among female and male students and their coping differences. The research concluded that female students indicated higher levels of stress and were more likely to utilize emotional coping mechanisms, while male students used problem-solving mechanisms.In the present study, females indicated greater feelings of anxiety, fear, crying, depression and blaming self as responses to stressors than males, whereas males indicated greater use of anger, smoking and thinking more about finding ways to solve the problem.

Research conducted by **Graves et al.** (2021) sheds light on sex differences in coping styles among university students, where female students have been found to experience higher levels of stress and use varying coping styles compared to male students. This observation suggests that resilience-building interventions might have to be gender-specific, as the stressors and coping styles are quite different among male and female students. This points to a significant aspect where educational programs might be tailored to build resilience by taking into account these differences.

Prowse et al. (2021) also touch on this subject in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, observing that female students faced higher academic and social stress. Their research indicates that it is essential to comprehend gender-specific coping strategies in order to develop successful resilience-building approaches, especially during crises that compound academic stress.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.METHOD:

3.1 AIM: The aim of this research study is to investigate the impact and correlation of academic stress with resilience, dispositional optimism and coping strategies among the UG and PG heterosexual university students of Kolkata within the age range of 18-25 years.

3.2 HYPOTHESES:

1. **H_0:** There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Resilience(RES)
   H_A: There is some significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Resilience(RES)

2. **H_0:** There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Dispositional Optimism(OPT)
   H_A: There is some significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Dispositional Optimism(OPT)

3. **H_0:** There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Emotion focused coping(EMO)
   H_A: There is some significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Emotion focused coping(EMO)

4. **H_0:** There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Problem focused coping(PROB)
   H_A: There is some significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Problem focused coping(PROB)

5. **H_0:** There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Avoidance focused coping(AVOID)
   H_A: There is some significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Avoidance focused coping(AVOID)

6. **H_0:** There is no significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Grade(UG & PG)
   H_A: There is some significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Grade(UG & PG)

7. **H_0:** There is no significant difference between Resilience(RES) and Grade(UG & PG)
   H_A: There is some significant difference between Resilience(RES) and Grade(UG & PG)

8. H_0: There is no significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Grade(UG & PG)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Grade(UG & PG)
9. H_0: There is no significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Grade(UG & PG)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Grade(UG & PG)

10. H_0: There is no significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Grade(UG & PG)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Grade(UG & PG)

11. H_0: There is no significant difference between Avoidance focused coping(AVOID) and Grade(UG & PG)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Avoidance focused coping(AVOID) and Grade(UG & PG)

12. H_0: There is no significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Sex(male and female)

13. H_0: There is no significant difference between Resilience and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Resilience and Sex(male and female)

14. H_0: There is no significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Sex(male and female)

15. H_0: There is no significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Sex(male and female)

16. H_0: There is no significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Sex(male and female)

17. H_0: There is no significant difference between Avoidance focused coping and Sex(male and female)
H_A: There is some significant difference between Avoidance focused coping and Sex(male and female)

3.3 SAMPLE: The sample size consisted of 200 students of sex; male and female, from Undergraduate and Postgraduate degrees from different colleges and universities of Kolkata. Their age was within the range of 18 to 25.

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE: The sampling technique used here is Purposive Sampling. Purposive sampling is a method of non probability sampling, where the participants are chosen based on the research purpose, as judged by the researcher regarding the individuals that will yield the most relevant or informative information. Participants are not randomly picked. It is used when the researcher wishes to concentrate on certain attributes of the population.

3.5 INCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Male and female students from UG and PG of any college or university of Kolkata
- Residents of Kolkata
- Age range within 18-25 Years

3.6 EXCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Any medical illness in self
- Any psychiatric illness in self

3.7 TOOLS USED:

1. ***Information Schedule:***

- Name
- Age
- Sex
- Residence
- Education
- Occupation
- Family type
- Socioeconomic Status
- Presence of Medical illness in self
- Presence of Psychiatric illness in self
- Presence of Medical illness in family
- Presence of Psychiatric illness in family
- Contact Number
- Email Id

2. ***Perceived Academic Stress Scale:***

- Academic stress typically arise when students feel mentally pressured because of the fear of failure or even the likelihood of struggling with their studies.
- Developed by Bewedy and Gabriel(2015)
    - Age Range: Above 12 years
    - This scale comprises 18 statements related to academic stressors. Participants rate each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). Four factors were extracted through factor analysis and the items are distributed among these 4 factors. These are: (1)the academic expectations subscale, (2) workload and examinations subscale (3) students' academic self-perceptions subscale and (4) time restraint subscale
    - Reliability and Validity: The internal consistency reliability that is the Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.7 for the 18 items. The tool was subjected to strict content validation, such as translation, adaptation, and expert panel ratings, to ensure its applicability and completeness in assessing academic stress among university students. thus the study had high content validity.
    - Scoring: Each item is rated on a 5 point Likert scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-Agree, 3-Neutral, 4-Disagree, 5-Strongly Disagree. The total score is obtained by adding up all the item responses. Reverse scoring are for the item numbers 4,5,7 and 8.
    - Interpretation: The possible score range is 18 to 90 with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived academic stress.

3. ***Connor Davidson Resilience Scale: (CD-RISC 25)***

- Resilience can be defined as the ability to bounce back from hardships of life.
    - Developed by Kathryn M Connor & Jonathan R.T. Davidson (2003)
    - Age range is from 13 to 65 years
    - CD-RISC 25: This scale consists of 25 items that represent different resilience characteristics, including adaptability, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. Each item is rated by the respondents on the basis of their experience in the last month. Connor and Davidson (2003) conducted exploratory factor analysis, with a sample of 577 adults from the general population. Five factors emerged from this analysis, which were termed as personal competence, high standards, and tenacity; trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative affect, and the strengthening effects of stress; positive acceptance of change and secure relationships with others; control and spiritual influences.
    - **Reliability:** Cronbach Alpha was found to be 0.89 for the general adult **population(n=577)** and the item total correlation was found to be 0.30 to 0.70
    - **Construct Validity:** Factor analysis of the CD-RISC-25 confirms a **multifactorial nature, with the general factors of personal competence, trust in instincts, tolerance of negative affect, positive acceptance of change, control, and spirituality** (Connor & Davidson, 2003)

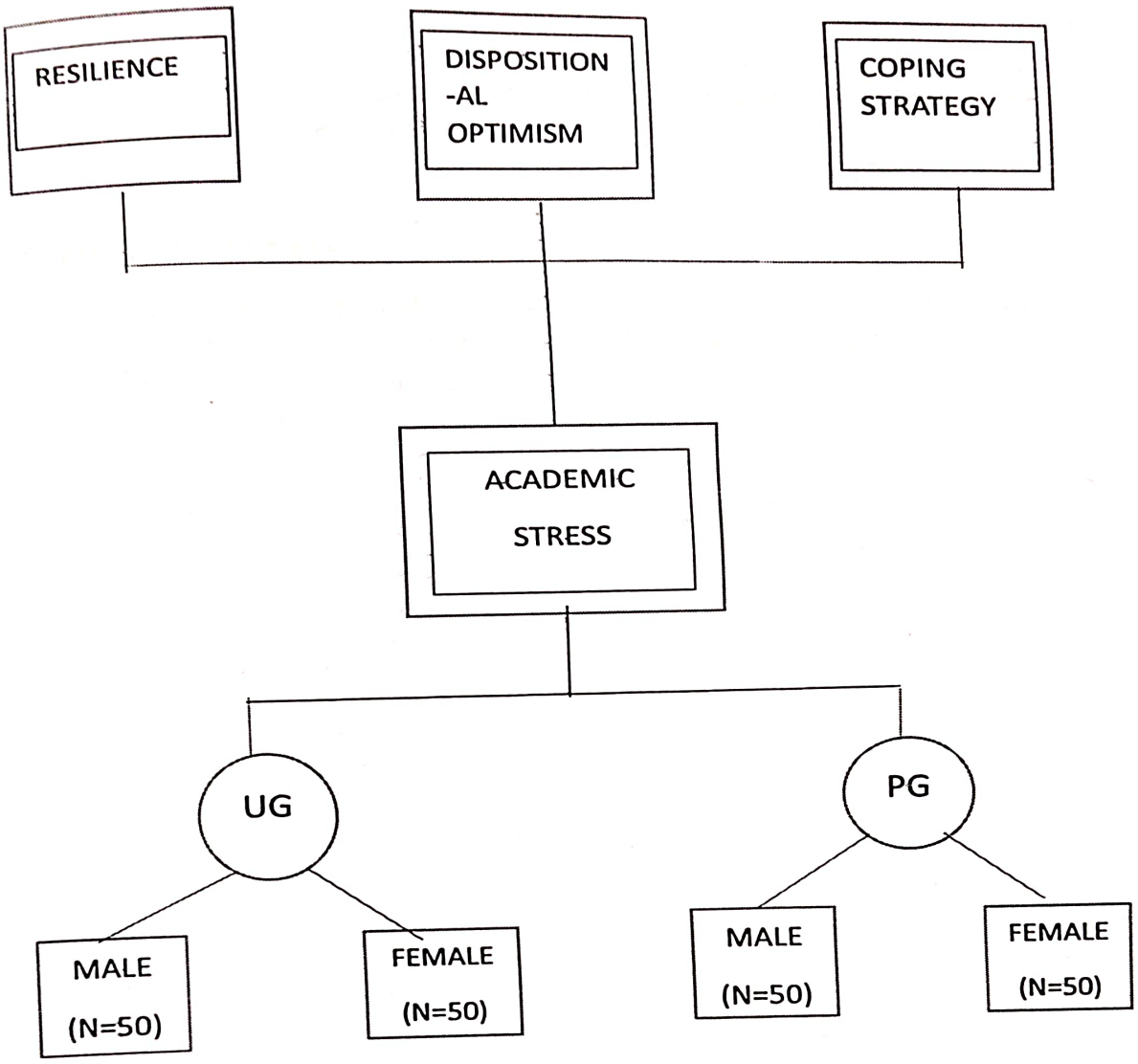
- Convergent Validity: The CD-RISC is positively correlated with hardiness, optimism, and social support, validating its use as an instrument for assessing resilience as a discrete construct.
- Scoring and interpretation: Each item is rated on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1(Strongly Disagree), 2(Disagree), 3(Neutral), 4(Agree), 5(Strongly Agree). Total score is obtained by adding up all the item scores. Higher scores indicate greater resilience.

4. ***Life Orientation Scale Revised***
    - Optimism can be defined as the positive outlook towards life.
    - Developed by Michael Scheier, Charles Carver and Bridges(1994)
    - Age Range- above 12
    - This is a psychological test instrument created to assess individual differences in dispositional optimism, which is the degree to which individuals have positive expectations about their future.
    - Reliability and validity: Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha=.78) and test-retest reliability (r=.68 after a four-week period, r=.60 after twelve months, r=.56 after twenty-four months, and r =.79 after twenty-eight months) for unidimensional use of the LOT-R has been found to be satisfactory. Convergent validity is evidenced by the significant and expected correlations with other constructs, e.g., depression, hopelessness, self-esteem, perceived stress, and locus of control (Scheier et al., 1994). The result that the correlations of the LOT and related scales are not excessively strong is presented as evidence for discriminant validity. Construct validity is provided by research indicating that the scores correlate highly with physical and psychological health and somewhat to the exclusion of measures of social desirability (Scheier and Carver, 1992).
    - Scoring: Each item is rated on a 5 point Likert scale from 0(Strongly Disagree), 1(Disagree), 2(Neutral), 3(Agree), 4(Strongly Agree). There are certain filler items which are not to be scored. (item numbers 2,5,6 and 8). Reverse scoring are done for the item numbers 3,7 and 9. Minimum score is 0 and maximum is 24.
    - Interpretation: Higher the score, higher the kevel of dispositional optimism. Score 0-13 indicates low optimism, 14-18 moderate optimism and 19-24 high optimism.

5. ***Brief COPE(Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory) Scale***
    - Coping strategies can be defined as the techniques individuals employ to deal with life's stressors.
    - Developed by C.S. Carver(1997)
    - Age range: above 12
    - It is a 28 items self-report questionnaire that assess individuals' coping responses to stress. It is the short version of the original 60 item cope inventory.

- Reliability and Validity: The Brief-COPE has excellent internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients between 0.50 and 0.90 for the various coping subscales. This implies that the items within each subscale are very much correlated with one another, meaning that they are assessing the same underlying construct.
- The Brief-COPE also has satisfactory test-retest reliability, with correlation coefficients between 0.60 and 0.80 for the various coping subscales. The Brief-COPE therefore yields similar scores when given to the same people at different times. The Brief-COPE has been found to have good content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity. Content validity is the degree to which a measure taps the entire range of content it is supposed to measure. The Brief-COPE was created after a thorough review of the literature on coping, and it measures a broad array of various coping strategies. Construct validity is the degree to which a measure is associated with other measures of the same construct. The Brief-COPE has been found to be associated with other measures of coping, including the COPE Inventory and the Ways of Coping Questionnaire. Criterion validity is the degree to which a measure is associated with other measures of similar constructs.
- Scoring: the items are scored on a 4 point Likert type rating scale ranging from 1(I haven't been doing this at all), 2(a little bit), 3(a medium amount), 4(I've been doing this a lot).
- Interpretation: The brief COPE does not provide a single overall total score. There are 3 domains namely: emotion focused coping, problem focused coping and avoidant focused coping. Higher score on a particular domain indicates greater use and reliance on that coping mechanism.

3.8 RESEARCH DESIGN:



3.9 PROCEDURE:

At first, an Informed Consent form was prepared which aimed at letting the participants know about the research in brief without having to actually reveal the variables as this might create an unwanted effect of bias. The participants were asked for their permission to participate and they were assured that this research involves no mental or physical harm and that their responses would be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes. Nobody was forced to participate against their will. Some participants refused after hearing about the debrief, yet they were not forced to participate. Second, an Information Schedule was prepared which contained all the necessary socioeconomic details of the participant along

with any presence of medical or psychiatric illness in family or self. Data was collected by going to various colleges and universities of parts of Kolkata. Before giving their data, the participants were given proper instructions for the four scales and they were assured that if they face any difficulty in a particular item, they would be explained. They were assured that there are no right and wrong responses and they can respond to every statement by indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with them by choosing the option that best suits their case by using a tick mark. The data was taken in offline mode where the participants gave data sitting infront of the researcher. After all the data collection was done, scoring was done according to the norms for each scale.

3.10 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

Once the data collection was completed, appropriate statistics were employed for analysing data using descriptive statistics, tests of normality and inferential statistics in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

CHAPTER 4: RESULT TABLE

4. *RESULT TABLE:*

4.1 Table representing values of Mean and SD of each variable:

VARIABLES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Perceived Academic Stress	65.07	9.756
Resilience	83.42	13.682
Dispositional Optimism	13.37	3.118
Emotion focused coping	22.70	5.571
Problem focused coping	26.23	5.176
Avoidance focused coping	14.73	4.142

4.2 Table representing Mean and SD of UG AND PG

GRADE	VARIABLES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
UG	Perceived Academic Stress	64.39	8.064
	Resilience	74.49	12.799
	Dispositional Optimism	11.77	2.155
	Emotion focused coping	22.94	5.350
	Problem focused coping	26.16	5.338
	Avoidance focused coping	14.23	4.020

GRADE	VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
PG	Perceived Academic Stress	65.74	11.198
	Resilience	92.35	7.167
	Dispositional Optimism	14.97	3.119
	Emotion focused coping	22.46	5.800
	Problem focused coping	26.29	5.034
	Avoidance focused coping	15.22	4.223

4.3 Table representing Mean and SD of Male and Female students

SEX	VARIABLES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
MALE	Perceived Academic Stress	67.71	10.502
	Resilience	81.43	17.245
	Dispositional Optimism	13.33	3.035
	Emotion focused coping	23.79	5.143
	Problem focused coping	25.00	4.853
	Avoidance focused coping	14.72	4.307

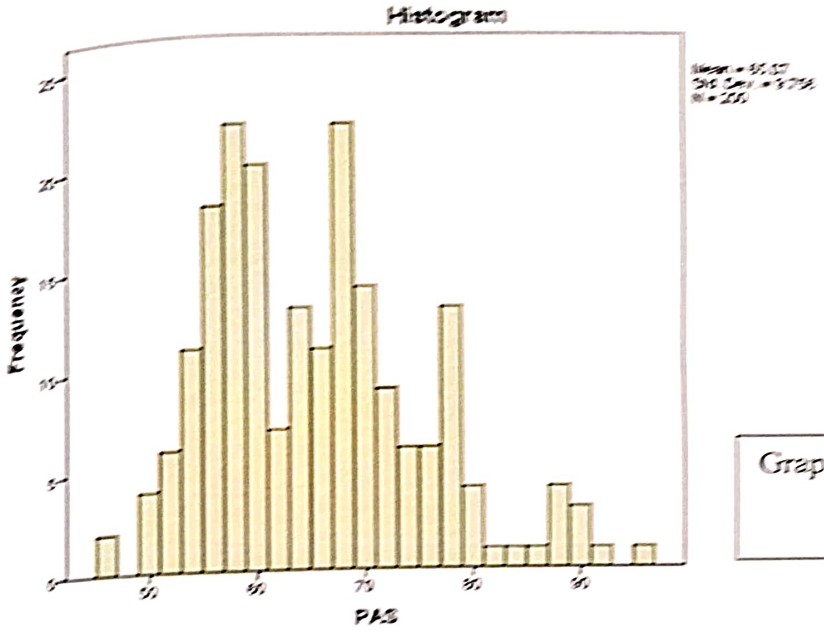
SEX	VARIABLES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
FEMALE	Perceived Academic Stress	62.42	8.180
	Resilience	85.41	8.418
	Dispositional Optimism	13.41	3.213
	Emotion focused coping	21.61	5.791
	Problem focused coping	27.45	5.221
	Avoidance focused coping	14.73	3.992

4.4 Table representing Skewness and Kurtosis values of each variable:

VARIABLES	SKEWNESS	KURTOSIS
Perceived Academic Stress	0.665	0.131
Resilience	-0.952	0.912
Dispositional Optimism	0.452	0.036
Emotion focused coping	0.226	-0.457
Problem focused coping	0.071	0.048
Avoidance focused coping	0.524	-0.291

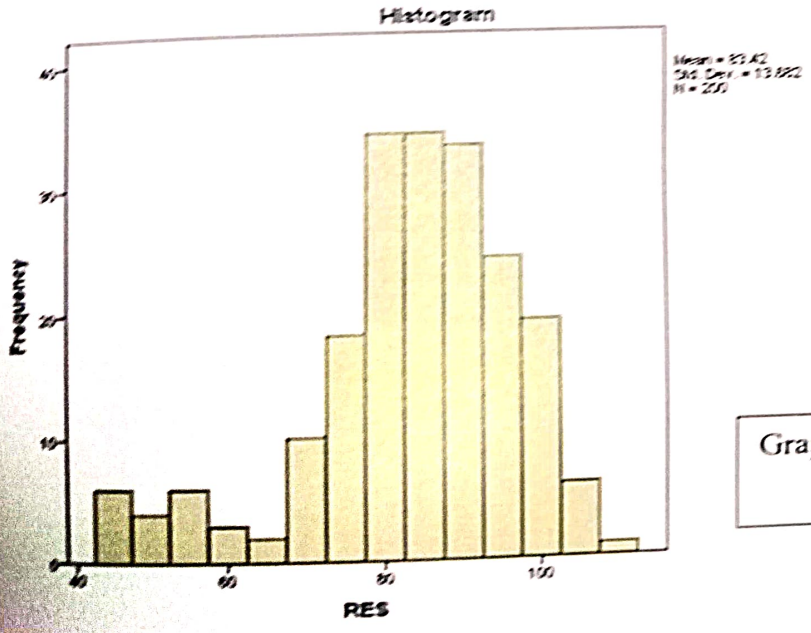
4.5 Graph representing histogram of each variable:

i) Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PAS)



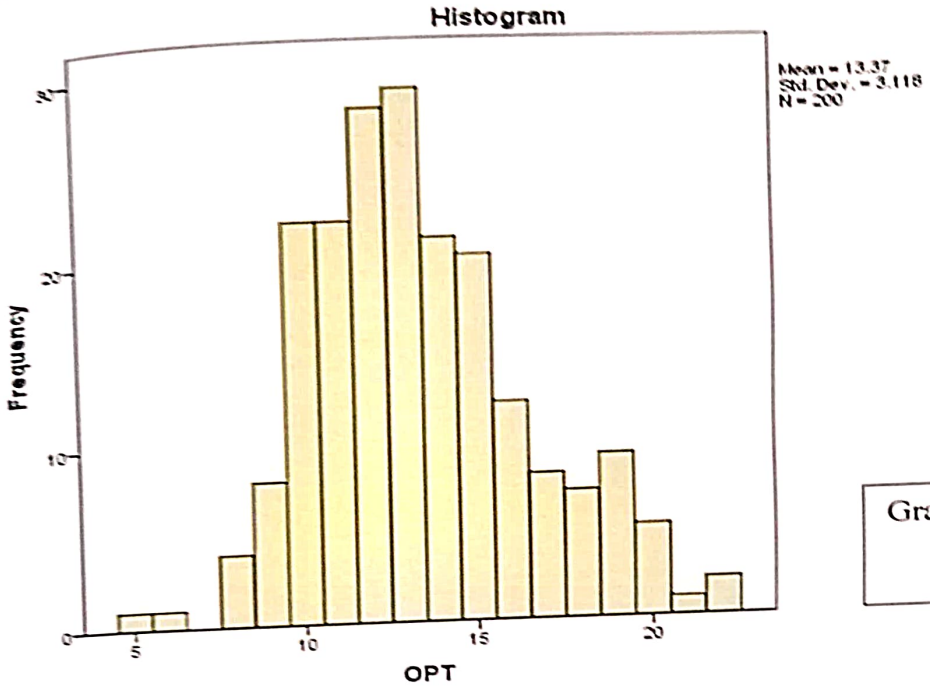
Graph no 1

ii) Resilience (RES)



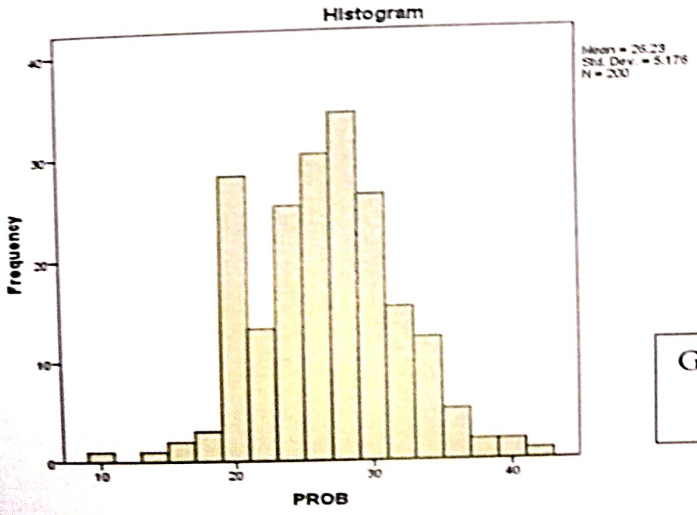
Graph no 2

iii) Optimism (OPT)



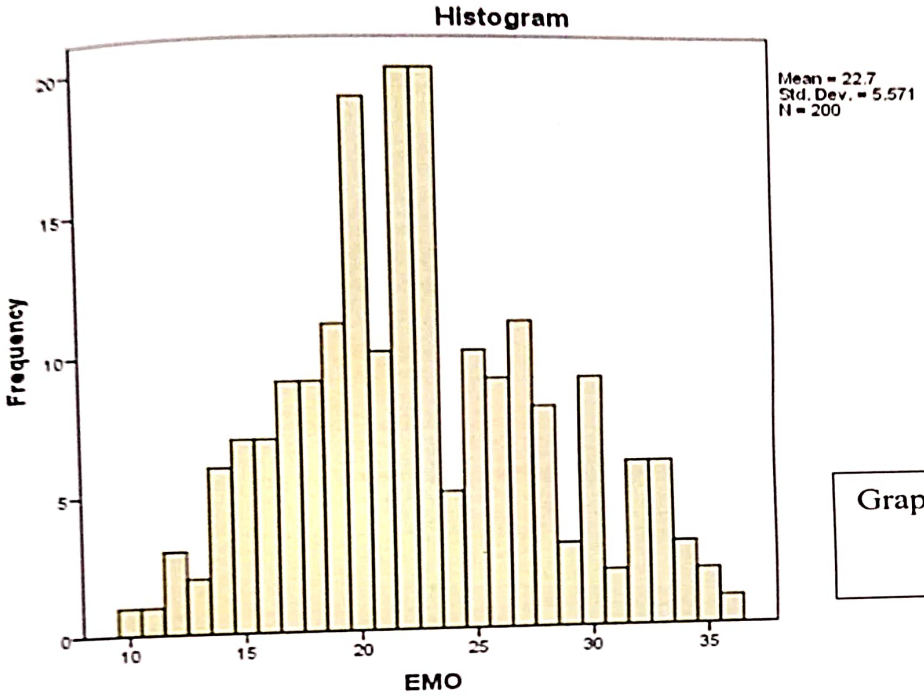
Graph number 3

iv) Problem focused coping (PROB)



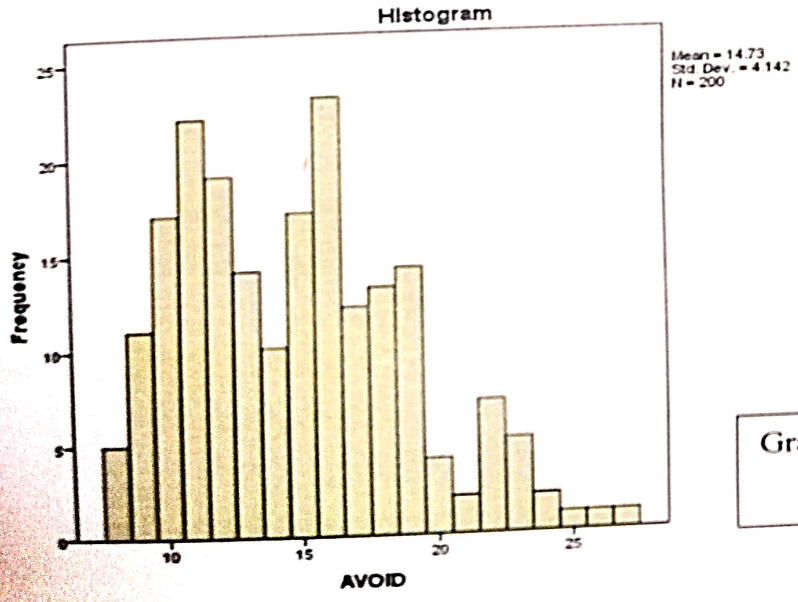
Graph no 4

v) Emotion focused coping (EMO)



Graph no 5

vi) Avoidance focused coping (AVOID)



Graph no 6

4.6 Tables representing values of Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PAS	.113	200	.000	.961	200	.000
RES	.108	200	.000	.931	200	.000
OPT	.122	200	.000	.971	200	.000
EMO	.104	200	.000	.984	200	.022
PROB	.060	200	.072	.991	200	.224
AVOID	.115	200	.000	.960	200	.000

4.7 Tables representing values of Correlation (Spearman)

i) **Perceived academic stress(PAS) and Resilience(RES)**

		RES	
Spearman's rho (ρ)	PAS	Correlation coefficient	0.003
		Significance	0.966
		N	200

Interpretation: Correlation coefficient of 0.003 indicates **no correlation.**

The p value of 0.996 indicates that since 0.996>0.05, the correlation is **Insignificant.** Therefore there is **no statistically significant correlation between PAS and RES.**

ii) **Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Dispositional Optimism(OPT)**

		OPT	
Spearman's rho (ρ)	PAS	Correlation coefficient	-0.28
		Significance	0.691
		N	200

Interpretation: Correlation coefficient of -0.28 indicates **weak negative correlation.**

The p value of 0.691 indicates that since 0.691>0.05, the correlation is **Insignificant,** therefore, there is **no statistically significant correlation between PAS and OPT.**

iii) **Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Emotion focused coping(EMO)**

		EMO	
Spearman's rho (ρ)	PAS	Correlation coefficient	0.224
		Significance	0.001
		N	200

Interpretation: correlation coefficient of 0.224 indicates a weak **positive correlation**

The p value of 0.001 indicates that since 0.001<0.05, the correlation Is **significant.** Therefore, there is **a statistically significant positive correlation between PAS And EMO. This implies that students**

experiencing greater academic stress tend to slightly increase their reliance on emotion focused coping.

iv) **Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Problem focused coping(PROB)**

		PROB	
Spearman's rho (ρ)	PAS	Correlation coefficient	-0.61
		Significance	0.393
		N	200

Interpretation: correlation coefficient of -0.61 indicates **moderate negative correlation.**

The p value of 0.393 indicates that since 0.393>0.05, the correlation is **insignificant.** Therefore, there is **no statistically significant correlation between PAS and PROB.**

v) **Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Avoidance focused coping(AVOID)**

		AVOID	
Spearman's rho	PAS	Correlation Coefficient	0.032
		Significance	0.653
		N	200

Interpretation: correlation coefficient of 0.032 indicates **weak positive correlation.**

The p value of 0.653 indicates that since 0.653>0.05, the correlation is **insignificant.** Therefore, there is **no statistically significant correlation between PAS and AVOID.**

4.8 Table representing values of Mann Whitney U test:

i) **Grade difference:**

VARIABLE	GRADE	N	MEAN RANK	MANN WHITNEY U VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE
PAS	UG	100	99.76	4926.000	0.856
	PG	100	101.24		
RES	UG	100	58.58	807.500	.000
	PG	100	142.43		
OPT	UG	100	71.90	2140.000	.000
	PG	100	129.10		
EMO	UG	100	103.57	4693.000	0.452
	PG	100	97.43		
PROB	UG	100	100.37	4987.000	0.975
	PG	100	100.63		
AVOID	UG	100	93.67	4316.500	0.094
	PG	100	107.34		

Interpretation: The above table indicates that there is **a significant difference** in Resilience(**RES**) among UG and PG students; p value 0.000<0.05, and Optimism(**OPT**) among UG and PG students; p value 0.000<0.05.

ii) **Sex difference:**

VARIABLE	SEX	N	MEAN RANK	MANN WHITNEY U VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE
PAS	FEMALE	100	115.06	3544.500	0.000
	MALE	100	85.95		
RES	FEMALE	100	98.90	4839.500	0.695
	MALE	100	102.11		
OPT	FEMALE	100	101.62	4888.000	0.783
	MALE	100	99.38		
EMO	FEMALE	100	113.14	3736.000	0.002
	MALE	100	87.86		
PROB	FEMALE	100	88.51	3800.500	0.003
	MALE	100	112.50		
AVOID	FEMALE	100	99.26	4876.000	0.761
	MALE	100	101.74		

Interpretation: The above table indicates that there is a **significant difference** in Perceived Academic Stress(**PAS**) among male and female students; p value 0.000<0.05, and emotion focused coping(**EMO**) among male and female students; p value 0.002<0.05, and problem focused coping(**PROB**) among male and female students; p value 0.003<0.05.

4.9 Hypothesis Testing:

Results indicate that the hypotheses:

i) H_o: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Resilience(RES) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no correlation between PAS and RES.

ii) H_o: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Dispositional Optimism(OPT) was found to be insignificant, which means H_0 is accepted. Therefore, there is no correlation between PAS and OPT.

iii) H_o: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Emotion focused coping(EMO) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there exists a correlation between PAS and EMO.

iv) H_o: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Problem focused coping(PROB) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no correlation between PAS and PROB.

v) H_0: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Avoidance focused coping(AVOID) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no correlation between PAS and AVOID.

vi) H_o: There is no significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no difference between PAS and grade.

vii) H_o: There is no significant difference between Resilience(RES) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between RES and grade.

viii) H_o: There is no significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between OPT and grade.

ix) H_o: There is no significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted.

Therefore, there is no significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Grade(UG & PG)

x) H_o: There is no significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Grade(UG & PG)

xi) H_o: There is no significant difference between Avoidance focused coping(AVOID) and Grade(UG & PG) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between Avoidance focused coping(AVOID) and Grade(UG & PG)

xii) H_o: There is no significant difference between Perceived Academic Stress(PAS) and Sex(male and female) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between PAS and Sex.

xiii) H_o: There is no significant difference between Resilience and Sex(male and female) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between RES and Sex

xiv) H_o: There is no significant difference between Dispositional Optimism(OPT) and Sex(male and female) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between OPT and Sex.

xv) H_o: There is no significant difference between Emotion focused coping(EMO) and Sex(male and female) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between EMO and Sex.

xvi) H_o: There is no significant difference between Problem focused coping(PROB) and Sex(male and female) was found to be significant, which means H_o is rejected and H_A is accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference between PROB and Sex.

xvii) H_o: There is no significant difference between Avoidance focused coping and Sex(male and female) was found to be insignificant, which means H_o is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between AVOID and Sex.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5. DISCUSSION:

The current study examined the correlations between academic stress, resilience, dispositional optimism, and coping strategies in UG and PG students from Kolkata. The results are crucial for understanding the way these psychological factors correlate and interact, as well as the effects of demographic variables like gender and education level on student well-being.

5.1. Perceived Academic Stress and Psychological Resources

Unlike much of the existing literature, academic stress (PAS) was not significantly related to resilience ($\rho = 0.003$, $p = 0.966$) or dispositional optimism ($\rho = -0.028$, $p = 0.691$). This finding is different from that of Ansari & Iqbal (2020) and Wilks (2008), who found a high level of negative correlation between academic stress and resilience. Similarly, Huan et al. (2006) and Vizoso et al. (2019) found optimism to buffer stress and predict better academic outcomes. This variation may be due to contextual and cultural reasons specific to Kolkata, including strict institutional systems, intense competition, and societal pressures. Students may consider stress as a natural byproduct of academic life, with resilience and optimism playing more as inner qualities than as protective barriers in the short run. Or it may also point towards the necessity of social and environmental support systems to render psychological qualities effective. Most of the past studies have reported a negative correlation between stress and resilience (Ansari & Iqbal, 2020; Wilks, 2008; Wang et al., 2022) and subsequently between stress and optimism (Huan et al., 2006; Vizoso et al., 2019). The observed differences suggest that in Kolkata, where stress at the academic level is made normal because of cutthroat competition, family pressure, and social expectation (Goyal, 2021). Here, resilience and optimism may not be effective buffers since stress is not seen as a "problem to solve" but an integral part of life. Eastern collectivist cultures tend to promote endurance and duty at the expense of personal agency, hence dampening the effects of internal dispositions such as optimism on perceived stress. Wilks (2008) also proposed that cultural values shape individuals' perception and reporting of stress and other factors that may mediate psychological protective effects. Social support has been shown to mediate this relationship, as emphasized by Wilks(2008) and Chaturvedi & Chander (2023): stress and individual coping resources.

5.2. Coping Strategies and Academic Stress

Of the three coping styles analyzed, only emotion-focused coping was found to be significantly and positively related to academic stress ($\rho = 0.224$, $p = 0.001$). This is consistent with previous research conducted by Sagone & De Caroli (2014) and Ramli et al. (2018), which indicates that stressed students tend to use emotional outlets or support systems when coping with uncontrollable academic requirements. Unexpectedly, problem-focused and avoidance-focused coping were not significantly correlated with academic stress. This runs counter to the work of Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) and Graves et al. (2021), which is evidence in favor of the use of problem-solving and rational strategies in stress reduction. The explanation may lie in the perceived lack of control or agency over academic achievement, making the students resort to

emotional regulation rather than task-oriented coping. Among the coping mechanisms considered, only emotion-focused coping showed a significant positive correlation with academic stress. This result is in accordance with that of Sagone & De Caroli (2014) and Graves et al. (2021), which concluded that students tend to rely on emotion regulation when they feel burdened by academic pressure. On the other hand, avoidance-focused and problem-focused coping had no significant correlation, a finding that was in line with research by Barman (2023) and Misigo (2015), who noted that not all coping mechanisms are adaptive in high-stress academic environments. The efficacy of coping styles also varies with situations, as noted in Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model (1984). In situations that are seen as uncontrollable—such as unexpected exam failure or competitive stress—emotion-focused coping may prevail, even though they might not cure the underlying causes of stress. As per Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, problem-focused coping works only when stressors are appraised as controllable. Yet, most academic stressors—such as high-stakes exams, tight deadlines, or grading systems—are perceived as externally imposed and unavoidable, especially in India's high-pressure academic culture. Even if students desire to employ problem-focused strategies (e.g., planning, time management), they might not have the confidence, training, or institutional resources to use them successfully. Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) stressed that successful employment of problem-focused coping necessitates the prior establishment of executive functioning and self-efficacy. In some cultures, especially in collectivist systems, students are taught to "endure" stress rather than challenge the system. This might lead to a suppression of problem-solving tendencies, with a greater reliance on emotional tolerance and spiritual or family support. Mallick & Kaur (2016) noted that Indian students often cope through emotional resignation and moral acceptance rather than active confrontation of stressors.

5.3. Educational Level (UG and PG)

When considering educational level, no significant difference in the perceived academic stress existed between PG and UG students, which means that academic stress prevails equally at both levels. The resilience and optimism were found to be significantly higher in PG students. These findings resonate with the research of Warren & Hale (2020), who indicated that maturity and academic experience play a role in enhancing resilience and dispositional characteristics over time. This can be an expression of the psychological development pattern across academic years, such that postgraduates have perhaps built stronger coping structures, social support networks, or more realistic expectations of success and failure. The study discovered far greater resilience and positivity among PG students compared to UG students, in line with the developmental perspective held by Warren & Hale (2020). Increased maturity, more academic exposure, and more sophisticated coping experience could be the reasons for these psychological upgrades. PG students are usually older, wiser, and have already made it through the academic system once at undergraduate level. Such experience adds to:

Increased emotional control (i.e., resilience), and A more realistic and less optimistic perception of outcomes. Warren & Hale (2020) established that optimism and resilience grow with academic advancement as a result of psychological maturity and exposure to varied learning challenges. Yet, academic stress levels were not appreciably different for UG and PG students.

This is consistent with reports by Goyal (2021) and Reddy (2018), who documented that academic stress is still widespread across levels of academics, though the psychological reactions and buffers can differ. in India's educational climate, both UG and PG students are subjected to constant performance pressure—entrance tests, career opportunities, social expectations—which reduces variation in stress levels between education levels. Chaturvedi & Chander (2023) observed that the intensity of stress on Indian campuses is high irrespective of academic level.

5.4. Differences in Sex:

analysis uncovered a number of important differences:

- Female students experienced significantly greater academic stress.
- They were also more likely to engage in emotion-focused coping.
- Male students, in contrast, engaged in problem-focused coping more frequently.

These results are further substantiated by Yalcin-Siedentopf et al. (2021), Anbumalar (2017), and Misigo (2015), whose studies established that female students will internalize stress and favor affective outlets, while males lean toward task-oriented strategies and determined that female Kenyan students tended to utilize socially-oriented or support-focused coping strategies, while males tended to externalize or suppress their stressors. In most cultures, such as India, women are culturally allowed and even expected at times to vent stress affectively (e.g., by sharing or crying). Men are supposed to "tough it out" or "remain strong", potentially encouraging problem-solution strategies—or emotional repression. Misigo (2015) and Nagle (2018) established that such norms influence male and female students' reporting and management of stress directly. Female students, particularly in conservative or transitional cultures such as India, tend to balance gender-role responsibilities (e.g., relationship expectations, safety issues, family responsibilities) with academic demands. This double burden means higher levels of academic stress. Goyal (2021) and Prowse et al. (2021) documented that gender-role expectations heightened psychological pressure among women students, particularly in urban India. Although male students demonstrated greater use of problem-focused coping, there is also social desirability bias to consider: Men might report higher action-based coping because they are supposed to seem emotionally resilient. At the same time, they might still suppress or internalize stress, which might not appear on self-report scales. Bacchi & Licinio (2017) cautioned that self-reports of coping tend to underrepresent male emotional distress because of stigma. The results also validate arguments by Graves et al. (2021) and Prowse et al. (2021) for gender-sensitive intervention programs in educational institutions. This emphasizes the imperative for gender-specific interventions. As an example, interventions among female students can involve building up emotional regulation, whereas males would gain from problem-solving and assertiveness training.

5.6 Interplay of Resilience and Optimism

In spite of the non-significant relationship with stress, resilience and optimism are still crucial characteristics in ensuring long-term academic well-being. Literature documents their predictive capability in academic performance and psychological well-being (e.g., Ruthig et al., 2006; Rand, 2020; Zaheer, 2022). For instance, optimism was reported to mediate between academic stress and emotional well-being in research by Agnes & Joy (2023) and Huynh et al. (2024). Rand (2020) and Ruthig et al. (2006) demonstrated that optimism acts as a mediator between stress and well-being, but not necessarily with moment-to-moment stress levels. Statistically insignificant relations may be practically significant, particularly in psychological constructs; Cultural influences may affect the way students respond to stress. Bacchi & Licinio (2017) highlighted that the levels of resilience usually don't match with stress since resilient people do experience stress—but heal quicker. In addition, resilience interventions like cognitive reframing, social support, and mindset training have been effective in reducing stress and burnout (e.g., Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Wang et al., 2022). Thus, despite the lack of statistical correlation in this research, both attributes deserve targeted promotion in student groups. Findings run counter to highly accepted literature confirming a negative correlation between optimism and stress (Vizoso et al., 2019; Ruthig et al., 2006). Nonetheless, a few Indian research such as Goyal (2021) and Zaheer (2022) have concluded that the correlation, though negative, is not always statistically significant—implying cultural or contextual mediators.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6. CONCLUSION:

The present study investigated the correlations between perceived academic stress, resilience, disposition optimism, and coping strategies among undergraduate and postgraduate students. It was found that even though resilience and optimism were much greater among PG students, these did not correlate significantly with perceived academic stress. Conversely, emotion-focused coping was positively correlated with academic stress, and sex differences were found in both stress levels and preferred coping—female students indicated higher stress and were more likely to employ emotion-focused coping, while male students were more likely to use problem-focused coping. These findings illustrate the complexity of academic stress as a function of personal, situational, and cultural factors. Though internal strengths like resilience and optimism may not decrease perceived stress in the short term, they are likely to exert a protective effect in the long run. Additionally, the prevalence of emotion-focused coping as a primary strategy suggests that students may perceive a lack of control or available support, which is where skill-building and structural systems of support come into play.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS

7. LIMITATIONS:

- Sample Specificity: The research was confined to Kolkata's UG and PG students who are biologically male and female, meaning that generalizability of the findings is confined to other regions, levels of education, or student identities (e.g., LGBTQ+, non-binary, non-collegiate learners).
- Self-Report Bias: Responses from self-reported questionnaires potentially introduced response biases, encompassing social desirability and faulty self-judgment.
- No Contextual Data: No external variables like family history, institutional protocols, or financial pressure were considered that could have affected stress levels or coping mechanisms.
- Time constraint: Because of time constraints, the research was completed within a comparatively short data collection window. This could have limited the depth of participant involvement and excluded a larger or more diverse sample. Furthermore, academic stress levels vary throughout the semester (e.g., exam periods vs. breaks), and a longer data collection period could have provided more accurate representation of stress variability over time.

CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS

8. *IMPLICATIONS:*

- Academic and Institutional Interventions: Colleges and universities should implement workshops on building resilience, optimism training courses, and stress-management workshops, especially for undergraduate students, who experienced lower psychological resources. Interventions responsive to sex differences can be created to respond to various coping requirements.
- Mental Health Services: University counseling services need to provide individualized interventions that center on emotional coping strategies, allowing students to manage affect while gradually constructing problem-solving skills. Installation of peer support systems and stress reduction through various techniques like mindfulness, journalling, might promote psychological resilience.
- Curriculum and Policy Design: Integrating life skills, time management, and self-efficacy skills in the curriculum would equip students with functional coping skills. Policy-makers and educators could think of alleviating academic load, flexible deadline setting, or incorporating mental breaks to minimize stress-generating structural rigidity.
- Research and Development: Subsequent research needs to examine longitudinal trends in order to understand better how optimism and resilience change and impact stress reactions across time. Having representative populations (e.g., economically disadvantaged, neurodivergent, or LGBTQIA+ students) included will offer a more comprehensive picture of academic stress dynamics.

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APPENDIX:

INFORMATION SCHEDULE

1.SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS:

- NAME:
- AGE:
- SEX:
- RESIDENCE: URBAN ☐ SUBURBAN ☐ RURAL ☐
- EDUCATION:
- OCCUPATION:
- FAMILY TYPE:
- SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: HIGH ☐ MIDDLE ☐ LOW ☐

2. PRESENCE OF MEDICAL ILLNESS IN SELF:

3. PRESENCE OF PSYCHIATRIC ILLNESS IN SELF:

4. PRESENCE OF MEDICAL ILLNESS IN FAMILY:

5. PRESENCE OF PSYCHIATRIC ILLNESS IN FAMILY:

6. CONTACT NUMBER:

7. EMAIL ID:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am Ishika Set, currently in my 4th semester, pursuing Msc in Applied Psychology from Sister Nivedita University, Kolkata. As a part of my curriculam, I am conducting a research study under the guidance of Ms Ankita Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Sister Nivedita University, Kolkata. This research study aims at understanding the relationship between some positive psychology variables in relation to academic stress among students.

The insights gained from this assessment will play a vital role in the completion of my research. I would be honored for your participation.

- This assessment will approximately take 10- 15 minutes to complete
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Any information obtained from this study that can be identified with you will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic and research purposes.
- This does not pose any mental or physical harm. Your participation is earnestly appreciated and I am grateful for your valuable time and contribution.
- At any point, participants can withdraw from this study if they feel uncomfortable.

I do hereby give consent to this research study.

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

PLACE:

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER:

DESIGNATION:

DATE:

PLACE:

QUESTIONNAIRE 1:

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following statements and choose the option that best suits your case by using a tick mark. There are no right or wrong answers

SL NO	STATEMENT	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
1	I am confident that I will be a successful student					
2	I am confident that I will be successful in my future career					
3	I can make academic decisions easily					
4	The time allotted to classes and academic work is enough					
5	I have enough time to relax after work					
6	My teachers are critical of my academic performance					
7	I fear failing courses this year					
8	I think that my worry about examinations is weakness of character					
9	Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me					
10	The size of the curriculum(workload) is excessive					
11	I believe that the amount of work assignment is too much					
12	I am unable to catch up if getting behind the work					
13	The unrealistic expectations of my parents stresses me out					
14	Competition with my peers for grades is quite intense					
15	The examination questions are usually difficult					
16	Examination time is short to complete the answers					
17	Examination times are very stressful to me					
18	Even if I pass my exams, I am worried about getting a job					

QUESTIONNAIRE 2:

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following statements and choose the option that best suits your case by using a tick mark. There are no right or wrong answers

SL NO	STATEMENTS	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
1	I am able to adapt when changes occur					
2	I have one close and secure relationship					
3	Sometimes fate or God helps me					
4	I can deal with whatever comes my way					
5	Past successes give me confidence					
6	I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems					
7	Having to cope with stress can make me stronger					
8	I tend to bounce back after illness, injury or other hardships					
9	I believe most things happen for a reason					
10	I make my best effort, no matter what					
11	I believe I can achieve my goals even if there are obstacles					
12	Even when hopeless, I do not give up					
13	In times of stress, I know where to find help					
14	Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly					
15	I prefer to take the lead in problem-solving					
16	I am not easily discouraged by failure					
17	I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's					

	challenges and difficulties					
18	I make unpopular or difficult decisions					
19	I am able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear and anger					
20	I have to act on a hunch					
21	I have a strong sense of purpose in life					
22	I feel like I am in control					
23	I like challenges					
24	I work to attain goals					
25	I take pride in my achievements					

QUESTIONNAIRE 3:

INSTRUCTIONS: Please respond as accurately and honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. Please choose your answer below.

SL NO	STATEMENTS	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	In uncertain times, I usually expect the best					
2	It's easy for me to relax					
3	If something can go wrong for me, it will					
4	I'm always optimistic about my future					
5	I enjoy my friends a lot					
6	It's important for me to keep busy					
7	I hardly ever expect things to go my way					
8	I don't get upset too easily					
9	I rarely count on good things happening to me					
10	Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad					

QUESTIONNAIRE 4

INSTRUCTIONS: : Please read the following statements and choose the option that best suits your case by using a tick mark. There are no right or wrong answers

SL NO	STATEMENTS	I haven't been doing this at all	a little bit	a medium amount	I've been doing this a lot
1	I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things				
2	I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in				
3	I've been saying to myself "this isn't real"				
4	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better				
5	I've been getting emotional support from others				
6	I've been giving up trying to deal with it				
7	I've been taking action to try to make the situation better				
8	I've been refusing to believe that it has happened				
9	I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape				
10	I've been getting help and advice from other people				
11	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it				
12	I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive				

13	I've been criticizing myself				
14	I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do				
15	I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone				
16	I've been giving up the attempt to cope				
17	I've been looking for something good in what is happening				
18	I've been making jokes about it				
19	I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping or shopping				
20	I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened				
21	I've been expressing my negative feelings				
22	I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs				
23	I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do				
24	I've been learning to live with it				
25	I've been thinking hard about what steps to take				
26	I've been blaming myself for things that happened				
27	I've been praying or meditating				
28	I've been making fun of the situation				